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MORI C03317860

ARMY review(s)
completed.

TO: DR. KISSINGER, WHITE HOUSE

FROM: GENERAL HAIG

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

I met with General Abrams for three and a half hours this afternoon and covered topics we programmed prior to my departure. We also covered in depth the plan MACV team is briefing to JCS and SecDef this week. As you know force level target of 60,000 as of 1 September 1972 contained in plan was dictated by SecDef. The plan was prepared by a select group of MACV staff on a most close hold basis. It has not had the benefit of the kind of scrubbing and refinement that more detailed staffing would have permitted. For this reason it should not be accepted as sufficiently tested to allow rigid application. For example, careful questioning of General Abrams and his J-3 confirmed that both would feel far more comfortable with target figure of 90,000 to 60,000 by September 1, 1972. For this reason I believe it is essential that you not allow President to become wedded to 60,000 figure. On the other hand, my discussions with General Abrams have convinced me that we have gone far enough now to make reductions to less than 100,000 by September 1972 an acceptable risk. I am also convinced that if certain minimum requirements are met this plan is workable and will not result in any serious unravelling here through period of our Presidential elections and well beyond. I will need more time here to consider thoroughly all minimum requirements which will have to be met; however, two are quite evident:

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PAGE TWO

1) TacAir sortie levels must be kept at 10,000 per mos for FY 72 and 8000 per mos for FY 73. B52 sortie levels must be kept at 1000 per mos thru FY 73. These levels will reduce risks acceptable only if sortie levels for Laos remain at rates consistent with those required by Ambassador Godley prior to LAMSON 719.

2) The US must be prepared to compensate with additional financial assistance for the drastic impact that US base closures and reduced US activity will have on SVN economy. Ambassador Bunker has described this as trading millions for billions.

General Abrams believes his plan will work and correctly makes the point that regardless of our rate of withdrawal, once our forces reach a certain level sometime after January 1, 1972, there is little point in quibbling about whether our level is 150,000 or 60,000. US ground forces will no longer have an impact on the conduct of the ground war. Therefore, from that point on, our force levels should be dictated by what is needed to continue to advise, to fill those areas of modernization shortfall needed by GVN forces such as intelligence, communications, some air cavalry capability and to accomplish the orderly out-loading of the tons of equipment and supplies which must be processed. Some local security is also called for but the large measure of security for US personnel will have to be provided by GVN forces because of dispersed geographic locations involved.

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PAGE THREE

The drastic nature of this plan will require the most sensitive handling with Thieu and the South Vietnamese. Its premature surfacing here could have a disastrous effect on Thieu's election chances and whole stability of GVN -- also, I believe its early surfacing at home could deprive President of major campaign coup. It should therefore be handled with utmost secrecy in Washington. The chances of leakage are high given past experience. Therefore I would urge you to caution Secretary Laird and the President of the absolute necessity of preventing its leaking until GVN can be appropriately brought aboard and until a game plan is devised to achieve maximum impact for President. Unfortunately handling will be complicated by need to give General Abrams approval to proceed with it not later than May 1. He must have this time to permit ports to handle out-loading in an orderly and responsible fashion. Reduced US strength will not permit any slippage beyond this date.

This plan and its drastic nature may lend itself to inclusion as key agenda item during July meeting of President's which I now believe should be held for a host of reasons.

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Army forces in this plan will total between 50 and 60,000 by September 1, 1972. I believe Army should be asked now to study if a figure of this kind could be sustained on a volunteer basis. Chances appear good from here but General Abrams has declined to commit himself on this item.

I will have comments for you on situation in Laos and Cambodia tomorrow. In the interim I urge you to discuss Abrams plan with President, highlighting need for absolute security and need to stay flexible on 60,000 figure which is best thought of as a range of 90,000 to 60,000. Best regards.

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